DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 201 967 CS 006 059

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TITLE The Power of Literacy: Applied to Traditional Birth Attendants, Saulteaux-Cree Indians and Hawaiian Children.
PUB DATE Jan 81
NOTE 19p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Claremont Reading Conference (48th, Claremont, CA, January 16-17, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Vocabulary; *Cultural Context; Cultural Influences; *Cultural Traits; *Functional Literacy; Hawaiians; Literacy; *Literacy Education; Reading Instruction; Teaching Methods; Vocabulary Development
IDENTIFIERS Cree (Tribe); *Freire (Paulo)

ABSTRACT

The literacy training strategy of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire has gained a great deal of recognition over the past 15 years. In Freire's method, the context of the learner's life is carefully studied to find the critical issues in the formulation of dialogue between teacher and learner. A basic vocabulary then is generated to insure power to change the learner's life. From this, instructional materials are generated to help the illiterate learners to read those items that will lead them to understand their world. This method would appear to be especially appropriate for three specific illiterate populations: (1) the traditional birth attendants who deliver most of the children around the world and who have a very powerful and unhealthy influence on third world health care; (2) the Saulteaux-Cree Indians in British Columbia, Canada, who have resisted the "paternalistic" education of the dominant Anglo culture in order to maintain their own culture; and (3) Hawaiian children who enter school with a cultural orientation toward listening respectfully and not asking questions, which is often misconstrued as disinterest or a learning disability. (HTH)

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THE POWER OF LITERACY: APPLIED TO TRADITIONAL BIRTH ATTENDANTS, SAULTEAUX-CREE INDIANS AND HAWAIIAN CHILDREN

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Introduction

The conference theme--"Reading - What is Basic?" confronts us with our failure in long range educational strategy. What is basic? How are we conceptualizing the importance of reading, language, literacy in people's lives?

Three themes seem to dominate current strategical thinking--behaviorism, humanism and the radical critics of education. Behaviorists, by and large, are concerned with methods that will shape the student to fit the school and society; they do not question or examine that structure. Humanists are concerned with change; they assume social change will occur when relevant learning enables the student to understand and trust their own desires for choice, options, and alternatives. Radical critics, among them Paulo Friere, assume that only fundamental transformations in the structure of society will bring the needed educational change; schools cannot continue to ignore the significant context of learners' lives.

Which approach is "basic"? Which approach helps us conceptualize most powerfully the importance of reading, language, and literacy in people's lives?

Where people are the poorest and most different, where they have the least access to the resources that provide possibilities for choices, our reading instructional efforts often fail. The author's recent experience with reading programs for poor minority children in both urban and rural settings as well as literacy training for adults in underdeveloped countries has generated some thoughts on what is basic.

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The present paper explores the generalizability of the literacy strategy of Paulo Friere to three highly varied situations--(1) the literacy training of Traditional Birth Attendants in underdeveloped countries; (2) a reading program for Saulteaux-Cree Indian children in British Columbia; and (3) a reading program for Hawaiian children. Implications for an overall educational strategy will be explored.

Word Power

A voice yells out, "FIRE!" and the room is vacated in an instant. REVOLUTION! And the masses take up arms. CANCER! And a life is dissolved. WATER! And a desert becomes a garden. WAR! And families are split assunder. GUILTY! And the string of life is torn. BRAVO! And a star is born. BASTARD! In response Leonardo da Vinci, Richard Wagner, Pope Clement VII and Marilyn Monroe step out of line. RETARDED! And a family's hopes are shattered. But it's only a word . . . one simple word can elate with passion or devastate into despair. Words created to facilitate our lives can destroy with equal ease.

Words have power. In a technological world the power of words increase daily. Words precipitate, initiate, sustain or culminate actions from birth unto death. Words so tender, acid or saccharine, holy or facetious, the course of life for a person or a nation hinges on the delicate strands of a word.

The ancient Greeks searched long and hard for essential elements and culminated their search with the words earth, air, fire and water. Their parsimonious search was to find the building blocks for understanding their world.

Having mastered the elements around them, the ancient Greeks went on to find the crux of actions and came up with three strategic words: logos

(logic); ethos (ethics-morality); and pathos (feeling). The ancient Greeks produced philosophers, statesmen, and poets to convey their way of life.

Three-thousand years after the Trojan War, we are still struggling to create words of power that will enable us to interact effectively. How can we convey our perceptions and feelings into logical and ethical actions? Today we have available sophisticated word processing computers, the mechanical marvels of our age. These metal and plastic monsters have an insatiable appetite for words, their hardware thrives on the software of words, mindful that the rule of the game is junk in, junk out. Powerful words with the technological support of extensive and rapid storage and retrival have become even more powerful. Advances in technology, however, do not appear to be solving our national and international literacy problems. Our tools appear to be dependent on how they are used and the value orientation of our reading strategy.

The Literacy Strategy of Paulo Friere

Over the past fifteen years there has been an increasing impact of the literacy training strategy of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Friere. "The methodology he developed was widely used by Catholics and others in literacy campaigns throughout the northeast of Brazil, and was considered such a threat to the old order that Friere was jailed immediately after the military coup in 1964," (Shane, 1970). He subsequently carried on his work in Chile, Cuba, at Harvard, and most recently in Geneva and Guinea Bissau.

In May 1970, Friere wrote an article for the Harvard Educational Review entitled, "The Adult Literacy Process as Cultural Action for Freedom," in which he establishes literacy training as a way of understanding and acting to influence the course of one's life.

In 1975, Paulo Friere received an UNESCO award for his teaching method, which is sometimes referred to as a psychosocial literacy method. "In the Friere method, the vocabulary of illiterates is used to teach them to read and understand their world" (Monteith, 1977).

Figure 1 shows a diagrammatic representation of the Friere strategy. The first phase in reading instruction can be characterized as one of analysis and cultural census. In this phase a careful study is made of the context of life of the learner in order to explore the critical issues in the formulation of the dialogue. In phase two, the basic vocabulary is generated to insure power to change the life of the learner including the basic sounds of the language, and acquisition from simple letters and sounds to complex ones. In phase three, the instructional materials are generated to insure self discovery in the dialogue process.

Developing a Basic Vocabulary for Traditional Birth Attendants

The World Health Organization (WHO) has launched a vast humanitarian effort to improve the lot of the three billion people in the world whose suffering goes unrelieved even by the most elementary health care and sanitation. This international effort calls for Health for All by the Year 2000. At the village level the traditional methods have failed.

At the very center of the traditional health care system in developing countries are the Traditional Brith Attendants (TBA's), they deliver more than 80 percent of the children in the world. Their procedures are often mystical and unsanitary, they are illiterate and very powerful influences over the entire health care system. The TBA's are in many instances the only health services available and their actions and attitudes are critical in establishing village health beliefs and practices.

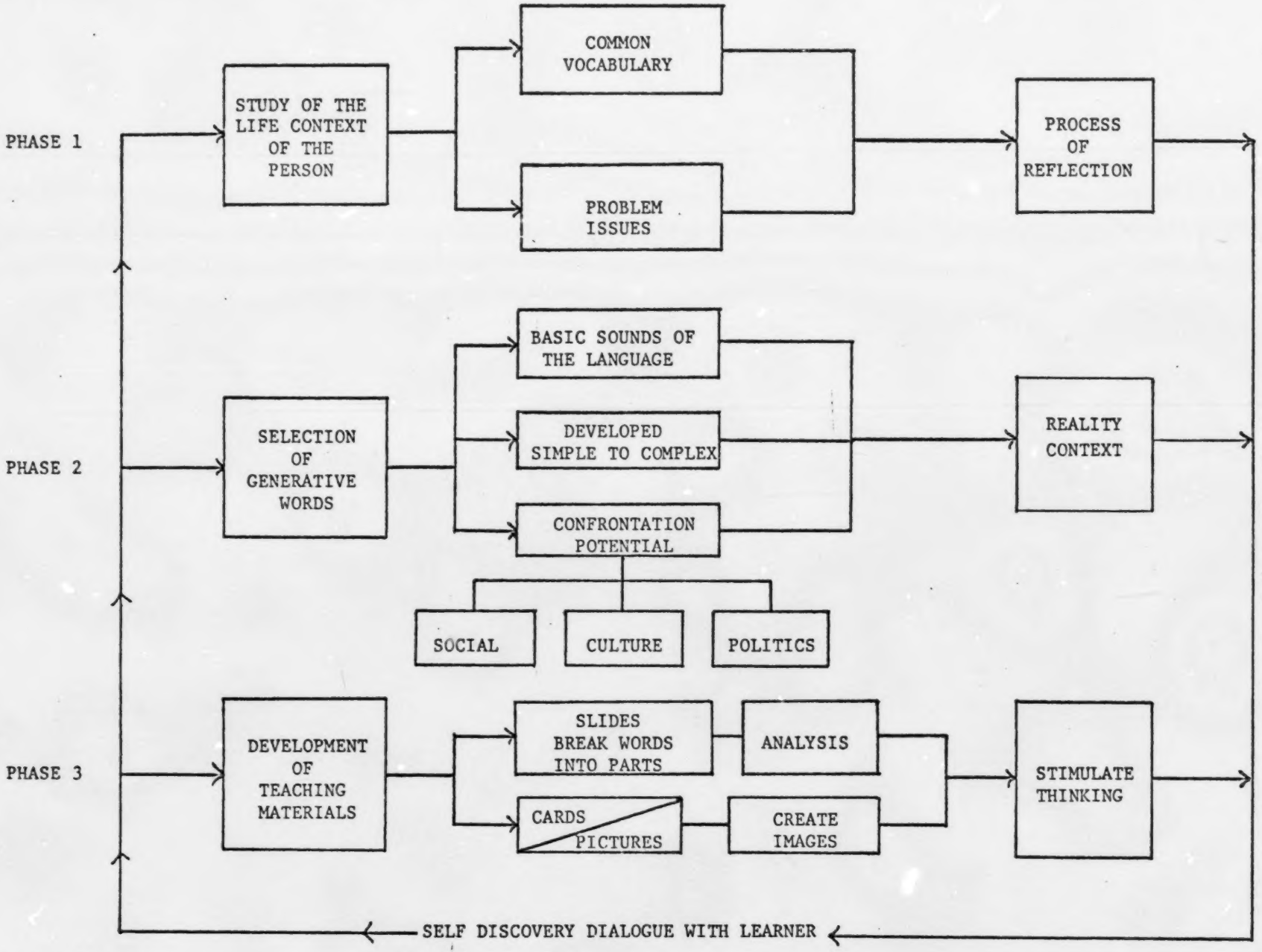

FIGURE 1. A DIAGRAMATIC REPRESENTATION OF PAULO FRIERE'S STRATEGY

The World Health Organization is currently contemplating a cooperative endeavor with the United Nations Educational and Scientific Children's Organization (UNESCO) to combine Traditional Birth Attendant training with literacy training. A literate and effective Traditional Birth Attendant can become the keystone of WHO's program, Health for All by the Year 2000.

The literacy and TBA training program under consideration is based upon the articulation of two strategies: (1) logic-oriented algorhythm flow charts in clinical practice and methodology that has proven efficient and effective for the diagnosis and management of health problems at the village level (Essex, 1978, Essex and Fargo, 1981); and (2) a literacy strategy based upon the work of Paulo Friere (1972).

The consolidation of these two strategies requires a basic vocabulary where the critical words for creating good health are integrated with the powerful words that will enable the Traditional Birth Attendant to master literacy.

The World Health Organization can miss its Health for All target for the Year 2000 by attempting to enforce a non-workable strategy.

In 1979, as part of WHO's contribution to the International Children's Year, a manual for health workers was produced by King, King, and Matodipoero (1980). These authors saw their work as being broadly applicable, "many of the procedures in primary care are common to all levels of worker, so we have deliberately addressed it to any 'health worker' who can read this manual and who provides primary care, usually with little opportunity to refer children for help." Unfortunately, their text is far too difficult for most health workers to read; in fact many health workers in underdeveloped countries are illiterate, as for example the majority of Traditional Birth Attendants.

On a typical page (see Table 1) of the 1980 manual published by King, et al, 31 items appear to be beyond ordinary understanding. This may illustrate the pitfalls of relying on a traditionally medically oriented illness strategy.

TABLE 1

A LIST OF DIFFICULT WORDS - PRIMARY CHILD CARE
King, King & Matodipoero
Oxford University Press, 1980 (p. 73)

1. milestones
2. organisms
3. stridor
4. fontanelle
5. abnormal
6. diagnosis
7. haemoglobin
8. urine
9. stool
10. haematocrit
11. sickle cells
12. thick blood film
13. acetone
14. isoniazid
15. aminosalicylate
16. dapsone
17. insuction
18. centrifuged deposit
19. ova of 5. haematobium
20. lactose
21. saline smear
22. sellotape swab
23. CSF
24. meningeal signs
25. Gram's method
26. leprosy
27. fungi
28. threadworms
29. symptoms
30. whooping
31. meningitis

The complexity of the words in Table 1 forces the learner like the Traditional Birth Attendant into a position of subservience to the "learned" doctors. This dependency position denies the TBA the effort of involvement in searching and makes them into passive recipients beholden to the knowledge of "experts".

Paulo Friere, 1980, in looking at the connection between the educator and the learner has suggested that their relationship is mediated by the object to be revealed. Friere believes "that the most important factor is the development of a critical attitude in relation to the object and not a discourse by the educator about the object." He sees knowing as different from guessing. For Friere, information is useful only when a problem has been posed. Without such a basic problem statement the furnishing of information is not a significant moment in the act of learning and becomes simply the transfer of something from the "learned educator to the dependent learner" (page 11, Pedagogy in Progress).

How is the literacy training of Traditional Birth Attendants related to developing reading programs for Saulteaux-Cree and Hawaiian children? Both successful literacy programs and reading programs have to be culturally specific, fully involving both the adult health worker (TBA) and children. The learner's curiosity must be stimulated and reading must have utility so that learners become active participants in the creative act of knowing. It would be impossible to design such a plan in Geneva or on a university campus. Reading instruction and literacy training according to Friere, 1980, is a political act, directly related to production, to health, and to the overall plan for the society. The essential vocabularies (generative vocabulary) have to be produced in each country on a dialogue process.

The critical words required for TBA-literacy training would be based upon the following principles that will empower TBA's to name, reflect and act in ways that maximize their potential to provide quality health services.

Criteria for essential words for Traditional Birth Attendants are:

1. Essential for use in the health management flow charts.
2. Essential for creating good health in the village.

3. Critical concepts required to make health promoting decisions in job of the TBA.
4. Essential for the development of literacy.
5. Built upon the mastery of village experiences which TBA's bring with them to the training dialogue.
6. Significant for the resolution of health problems endemic to the particular locale.

At this point we can only speculate on the list of these "critical" words. The proposed project would utilize a data base iterative research dialogue approach to generate the essential vocabulary. These studies would require participation of teams of health educators, pyschologists, psycholinguists, and sociolinguists in a position of equivalent-dialogue with Traditional Birth Attendants.

To create good health requires: clean water
good food
sanitary handling of wastes
adequate shelter
enough rest
adequate clothing

A Tentative List of Generative Words for Traditional Birth Attendants

1. work
2. water
3. food
4. shelter
5. clothing
6. relationships
7. beliefs
8. behaviors
9. illness
10. health

The list above would have to be adapted to the requirements of a specific locale, problems, needs, and the basic sounds of each local language.

Developing a Basic Vocabulary for Saulteaux-Cree Indian Children

In New Caledonia an area that was later to be called British Columbia, the Saulteaux band of the Cree Nation lived with few signs of western civilization. It was the Hudson Bay Company that brought Western ways as they set up a string of outposts. The Company flag flew in paternalistic partnership with the British flag. In 1849, the Company began providing education for the "children of officers and servants of the Company."

For a hundred years or more, little attention was given to the needs of Indian children. It wasn't until 1972 that the Provincial Government decided to hire a consultant in Indian Education. This token move was in response to a growing awareness of the seriousness of the educational problems of native Indian children.

From 1972 to date, the British Columbia Ministry of Education has gradually increased its support to school districts to provide for native Indian para-educators, native Indian language, culture and other alternative education programs (Csabo, 1980).

Unfortunately the carryover of a paternalistic/didactic strategy has not produced a dramatic equilization of the achievement of Indian and non-Indian children. The Saulteaux-Cree who greeted the Hudson Bay Company representatives on their arrival have remained closer to their Indian ways than the ways of their governors. The educational system is run by and for the dominant culture, and native Indian children have not demonstrated mastery of school skills. The "paternalistic" approach denies these learners the effort of searching, hence, learning is "owned" by the teacher and the learner becomes a more and more passive recipient. This passive, receptive attitude contradicts the creative act of knowing (Friere, 1979).

If we are able to relinquish our authority relationship over pupils we may be able to create a basis for the dialogue that Friere speaks of. The following conversation indicates that the dialogue process will require flexibility and patience on our part.

"DIALOGUE BETWEEN DAVID, A 9-YEAR OLD SAULTEAUX-CREE INDIAN AND HIS TEACHER - OCTOBER, 1980"

David: "Teacher do you know what āmish wāpoosak means?"

Teacher: "No David, you know I don't speak Cree."

David: "I could teach you, you know."

Teacher: "Could you?"

David: "Sure."

Teacher: "How long do you think it would take me?"

David: "Not long. We could have lessons at school."

Teacher: "When would they be?"

David: "At lunch time."

Teacher: "How long should they last?"

David: "About an hour."

Teacher: "How much would it cost?"

David: "About a dollar to teach a teacher, a dollar a lesson. When do you want to start?"

Teacher: "Tomorrow."

Next Day

David: "My mum says the Cree teacher in Williams Lake gets $9.00 an hour."

If we re-examine the relationship between the roles of the teacher and learner we can perhaps move reading and writing from mechanical processes into the development of relationships that enable skill development. We are faced with a broad range of choices in educational strategies from an authority

orientation to a dialogue. It may be that we are now ready to try a dialogue approach since the expert-colonial authority of paternalism has failed for the past 150 years. The colonial orientation has given high priority to the de-Indianization of the tribes, and yet they have survived. The Saulteaux-Cree children are today more Indian than Canadian and this fact may provide the key to developing their reading and writing skills.

Listed below in Table 2 are tentative sets of generative words which can form the basis of an "education for critical consciousness" (Friere, 1979).

Table 2

BASIC GENERATIVE WORDS OF THE SAULTEAUX-CREE

moose	mooswa*	Enough food for the winter, also source for clothing, salable, decorative
band	tipahuskan-ayisenikwuk	Extended family, from 4 to 100 families
school	kiskinoha kiskinohamatogumik	Must start at 7, universal to age 14
logging	kawahegeewin	Main cash occupation of men; straight wages, men own no equipment
elders	kihtee-ayisenihwuk	The leaders of the band
winter	pipon	From freeze up to break up, normally November to April
spirits	otchachahkwuk	Ancestors and important animals; visitations by spirits of recent dead
trapping	notchihchigeewin	Trapping lines as long as 60 miles for a band
treaty status	niheeyaoo otinigeewin	Ancestors signed a treaty guaranteed benefits
rodeo	metaw kesigawoo	Compete for cash and prizes, local hero, aspiration for boys and girls

*C. Dokkie/A. Vicente, Moberly Lake, British Columbia.

Developing a Basic Vocabulary for Hawaiian Children*

In a recent study of ethnicity and Special Education in Hawaii, Welch, 1978, indicated a substanital over-representation of Hawaiian/part-Hawaiian children. Although Hawaiian/part-Hawaiian children represented 20.3 percent of the school population 1977-78, they represented 30.6 percent of the children designated as having Learning Disabilities and 32.3 percent of children in classes for the Educable Mentally Retarded. This over-representation by approximately 50 percent of Hawaiians is a cause of concern. There appears to be a marked "mis-match" between these children, their culture-experiences and the "press" of dominant culture, schools, and teachers.

Some examples of the conflict in values with the dominant school system and the Hawaiian learning system which the child experiences at home and in the Hawaiian community are:

1. Observe and listen carefully to the person "teaching";
2. Don't ask questions of the "teacher" while instruction is proceeding;
3. Think carefully about the process being demonstrated before asking "stupid" questions ("stupid" questions are those whose answers are self-evident if one would observe and think carefully; being nīele or curious is considered unacceptable in Hawaiian culture and with students this usually translates into asking questions for the sake of asking questions);
4. Try your hand literally or figuratively at doing what is being taught;
5. Get help when needed from your peers--they must help you in the spirit of 'ohana; and,

*This section is the result of a dialogue with Robert Lokomaika'iokalani Snakenberg, Education Specialist, Hawaiian Studies, Hawaii State Department of Education.

6. When you are ready, demonstrate to your teacher and peers your achievement in the knowledge, skill and process being taught but be humble about your accomplishment.

Hawaiian youngsters thus enter school oriented to a style of learning that will quickly be labelled as disinterested, close-mouthed, afraid to ask questions or share thoughts, and perhaps even "retarded" or "learning disabled".

Utilizing the strategy of Friere, 1972, an attempt is made here to generate a series of powerful words that can affect the learning and lives of Hawaii children.

The criteria for the selection of words are:

1. Words chosen should have social power to evoke change in a person's life.

   The words chosen contain some of the most powerful Hawaiian words pertaining to cultural knowledge, concepts and practices carried on by the Hawaiian people. Cultural knowledge gained through the study of these words may lead to a heightened sense of cultural identity and improved self-image among students who have not had the opportunity to explore these aspects of their cultural heritage.

   Study of these words by non-Hawaiian students and teachers may lead to an improved appreciation of the depth of the Hawaiian cultural heritage still extant in Hawai'i nei.

2. Words chosen in a set should contain all the basic sounds of the language.

   The words chosen contain the five vowels (A-E-I-O-U), the consonants (H-K-L-M-N-P-W), the troublesome vowel clusters AI and AU, the vowel clusters UA and EI, the glottal stop (') and the macron (¯).

3. Words chosen should be able to serve as building blocks for word (vocabulary) and concept expansion.

The words chosen are especially rich in the area of vocabulary and concept expansion. Some of the elements which make up the words and some of the vocabulary/concept expansions which can be made are suggested below:

'AUMAKUA	'au makua kua ua
KUPUNA	ku kupu puna
MO'OPUNA	mo'o mo'oku'auhau 'opu puna
LEI	numerous kinds of lei ho'olei

A tentative list of ten generative Hawaiian words is included below:

1.	'AUMAKUA	Ancestor who has become family guardian spirit
2.	KUPUNA/MO'OPUNA	Grandparent/grandchild
3.	LEI	Garland to be worn around head, neck or shoulders; poetic meaning - child
4.	KAMA'ĀINA	Literally: child of the land; native to a place; to know, to be acquainted with
5.	ALOHA	Love, compassion, mercy, pity; to love, to greet
6.	KOKUA	Help, cooperation; to help, to cooperate
7.	LAULIMA/LŌKAHI	Literally: many hands, to work cooperatively together/unity, to unite, to reach a consensus
8.	HO'OPONOPONO	Literally: to set right, to set straight; Hawaiian family problem resolving strategy or technique, family group therapy

9.	HANA	Work, activity; to work, to make, to do
10.	WAI	Fresh water; who?

The use of kupuna (grandparents) to instruct in the acquisition of this basic vocabulary enhances the continuity of the culture and the cohesion of the community.

Conclusion

Illiterate adults in critical positions in undeveloped nations (like the TBA's) and declassed minority children who could take critical positions in disadvantaged subcultures (like the Saulteaux-Cree and Hawaiian children) are not reading what is basic to their lives. So they are failing--not in the obvious way in which the established power measures failure--but failing to grab hold of the core of their own cultural questions and the tools to search for alternatives for choices, responsibility and self-actualization.

Middle-class, advantaged, majority children in schools are also failing to grab hold of the core of their own cultural questions--the real alternatives for considering the issues of poverty, power, competition, cooperation, assimilation, pluralism--and thus are deprived of the power to search for new choices.

Perhaps, then, what is basic is that the content of reading be designed so that the issues of peoples' lives come up--so that the vocabulary of their lives brings insight--so that the language they develop brings them power.

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